

**Intercultural Communication Competence:
Educating Students for Global Networking**

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Abstract

With the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) becoming the buzz words of today, intercultural communication is increasingly relevant. There is a need to educate students on the effective and culturally sensitive ways of communicating with diverse others in multiple spaces they are in, particularly in the campus and the virtual realm. The advanced technology combined with students' interest to engage in it as opposed to the traditional classroom, makes it more pertinent for all educators to find ways to prepare culturally diverse students for global competence. Drawing from the focus group data, this paper discusses the various approaches used by students when communicating with the others in Malaysian universities. More specifically, the paper highlights how communication skills affect interaction and as a result, influence cross-cultural understanding among diverse people. It also brings to light the importance of exposing students to global competence which in the long run, can assist students to venture more effectively into the cultural and high-tech world. The paper ends with several implications of intercultural communication competence and cross-cultural awareness among students in today's networked world.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, global competence, industry 4.0, Malaysia

Introduction

One cannot avoid communicating with the other in today's globalised world. Taking cue from a communication scholar, Karl Watzlawick, who argued that a person cannot *not* communicate as one of the five communication axioms (Watzlawick et al., 1967), this paper contends that human communication ought to be embraced more considerably and passionately alongside technology. It argues that the very presence of diverse individuals regardless of the ethnicity, culture, religion, age, gender, and more specifically, language ought to be recognised and taken more seriously. It is in this context that intercultural communication (competence) is viewed as pertinent and has become increasingly critical to understand particularly in the twenty-first century (Chen, 2014; Dai & Chen 2014; Sorrells, 2014). This has become even more relevant given that the world today is fused with the fourth industrial revolution (IR 4.0), or the concept IR 4.0 highlighting specific enabling technologies including big data, where digital media and the Internet of things (IoT) have been the sources of information and cooperation among people worldwide. This requires not only understanding of how such technologies work, but also, how humans and computer work together in harmony to achieve the desired outcome. Social media have become addictive to many people irrespective of age. The impact tends to be huge even if some might opt to ignore the penetration of technology like *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Whatsapp*, *Snapchat* in addition to many others including *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Tumblr*, *LinkedIn*, *Youtube*, and *Pandora*. The social networks are fluid and dynamic attracting many users, in particular, the younger generation (=N generation) who prefers the digital communication (Lebedko, 2014). For businesses and industries, skilled workers are valuable assets in customer service encounters which undoubtedly require effective intercultural communication competence (Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2014) and language competence for awesome (polite) hospitality and effective interethnic interactions (Blue & Harun, 2003; Dalib et al., 2017b; Harun, 2007). Thus, echoing Chen and Starosta (2016), the paper argues that not only skilled workers or those who do business with global others need to have good communication skills cross-culturally. Rather, everyone especially young people should be competent communicators to converse appropriately and effectively with culturally diverse others around the globe. If companies start investing in training skilled workers for the industry 4.0, educators also ought to reflect on the importance and impact of intercultural communication competence on one's social interaction by creating similar awareness among students in class and the campus community (Dalib et al., 2017a).

This paper is derived out of the need to moot intercultural communication competence as a catalyst in building healthy and effective form of interaction among diverse individuals in today's digitized and globalized world. Globalization enables series of information to flow to people in the world in almost all aspects of life, including economic, social, political, cultural, and religious matters. In this sense, globalization and informatization seem to work hand in hand (Soproni & Horga, 2008). As such, the paper begins by unfolding the various perspectives of intercultural communication competence. It also highlights the relevance of such competence in the world where social media are ever changing and creeping into people's daily lives, in particular, among non-Westerners. More specifically, it examines how Malaysian students' intercultural competence impacts interactions with others through personal reflections. The paper ends with some recommendations on the impact of social networking on intercultural communication competence.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: THE BRIEF PERSPECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

Intercultural communication competence has evolved since its first conception. To begin with, the notion intercultural communication inevitably means many things to various scholars (e.g., Kim, 1988; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Sarbaugh, 1979, 1988) given the wide spectrum of scholars and researchers in the field, be it Western or Asian (Bennet, 1986; Chen, 2014; Deardorff, 2004; Hall, 1959; Hoffer, 2008; Hofstede, 1984; Jandt, 2013; Kim, 2002; Kim & Gudykunst, 1988; Lewis, 2005; Miike, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Trompenaars & Wooliams, 2003; Yum, 2012). For sure, the concept was introduced by Edward Hall, an American anthropologist and the founding father of intercultural communication, in his book, *The silent language* (Hall, 1959; see also Rogers et al., 2002) which brings to light the elements of hidden dimensions. As posited by Rogers and associates (2002), Hall emphasised the micro-level behavior of "interactions between people of different cultures" (p. 5). Such culturally diverse human communication is seen as pertinent during his time at the Foreign Service Institute, the US Department of States where the intercultural communication story began (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). With globalization and informatization moving supposedly hand-in-hand and influencing the ways in which we communicate with others (Kluver, 2004), intercultural encounters seem inevitable.

To be globally competent, one needs to have knowledge of the others in the society. Similarly, to be a competent intercultural communicator, one needs to know the other interlocutor well to have an effective communication. This might mean, knowing the background, beliefs, habits, attitude, language, and the mindsets of the others. As Chen (2014) posited, "global communication competence may require something more than intercultural communication competence" (p. 27). Deardorff (2009) asserted that intercultural interaction is very much determined by people's perceived membership to a cultural group and the extent to which it affects their interaction. This further indicates that having exposed to the other provides opportunity for intercultural encounters where verbal and non-verbal acts are observable. According to Deardorff (2004), important components of intercultural communication competence include effectiveness, appropriateness, intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and how one conducts himself or herself. Further components include knowledge, skills, and attitude of the interlocutors.

Using Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as the theoretical framework, we see the need to explore the students' interaction experiences. This is the case given that they will be working in the environment where communication with cultural others is important. As such, they need to be competent in not only English language, but also in intercultural communication. In intercultural encounters, accommodating ones' language is also a matter of politeness and necessity. The CAT, originally known as the speech accommodation theory, concerns how interlocutors adjust their speech in interpersonal (intercultural) interactions, in particular, how native speakers adapt to the non-native speakers of English in making the communication intelligible (Gallois, Franklin-Stokes, Giles & Coupland, 1988; Gallois & Giles, 2015; Gallois, Ogay & Giles, 2005; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). As asserted by Gallois et al. (1995), CAT is a theory of intercultural communication that actually attends to communication. In this paper, the theory seems pertinent and relevant as a reference point to our understanding of how the interlocutors 'fine-tune' their speech to cope with their international communication partners. Uniquely, such fine-tuning acts were done based on the students' sensemaking of the intercultural encounters in the Malaysian university environment.

EDUCATING STUDENTS FOR GLOBAL NETWORKING: THE CAMPUS SCENARIO

Global networking entails several elements for it to happen. Such elements will include the idea of welcoming international (foreign) students in the context of higher education institutions with certain accompanying procedure and activities. This can happen through internationalization approach where the university will be seen as accepting the *Others* alongside the locals. Such globalisation act indicates economic ties among universities (Kluver, 2000) who have memorandum of understanding. Internationalization is thus considered an important feature of the university (Simm & Marvell, 2017). Such an approach enables not only the particular university to engage in collaborative acts with the other universities, but also encourages the participating students to meet with culturally diverse others in various academic programs including student exchange programs, buddy programs, student inter-varsity debates and competitions, and field trips. Similarly, local students can actively join the programs by volunteering and nominating themselves or others with the intention of learning about other people's cultures and enriching social and academic experiences. In other words, knowledge gain and supposedly knowledge transfer should be in the agenda of education mobility. Embedded in the process is good or rather effective communication skills which tend to lead the individuals involved to particular outcomes. As shared by Kluver (2000):

given the transforming effects of globalization and informatization in the social and cultural worlds, it is imperative for scholars of intercultural communication to begin to understand how these forces will affect not only the foundational theoretical assumptions of our scholarship, but also the significant impact of these trends on the actual practice of intercultural communication.
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan002006.htm>

In Malaysia currently, the new government signals at least two significant elements pertaining to the impact of informatization and globalization to cultured individuals around the globe; one, the fact that many Malaysians tend to unite regardless of ethnicities upon hearing about the 'Malaysians Hope Fund' (*Tabung Harapan Malaysia*); news that is circulated using different modes of technology, and thus the people want to contribute, and as a result, extend the news, and the other, the government is mooting for diversity to be embraced more meaningfully. Evidently, in the recent speech addressing the Japanese Press Conference, Tun Mahathir, the seventh Malaysian Prime Minister expressed the willingness to learn other cultures, and being friendly to all nations, in particular, to learn from the Japanese people about their technology and culture. The idea might be mundane to some, yet, the fact that so many people can view this act (and hear the call), makes a difference in today's world of civilization. This aligns well with Moran et al.'s (2011) claim that culture impacts relationships and business operations (p. 4) given the rather invisible barrier of communication and negotiation surrounding the advancement of technology. What the two elements entail is that more and more people will want to know more about the others by simply using the different technologies for information, be it for good or bad outcomes. For sure, elements of uncertainties can be reduced or lessened with sufficient information even though face-to-face encounters are still made possible via virtual platforms such as *Skype* and *WeChat*. This further indicates that everyone can access any information with such technologies including youths, university students in particular. With the assistance from *Google*, the student community can learn about other cultures outside of their own comfort zones as much as they need to without ever traveling to the country of the other. Whether they are able to reduce the diversity and communication barrier based on the electronic

information gathered, this will only be revealed when the actual interactions occur. As defined by Rivers (1987):

Interaction involves not just expression of one's own ideas but comprehension of those of others. One listens to others; one responds (directly or indirectly); others listen and respond. The participants work out interpretations of meaning through this interaction, which is always understood in a context, physical or experiential, with nonverbal cues adding aspects of meaning beyond the verbal. All of these factors should be present as students learn to communicate: listening to others, talking with others, negotiating meaning in a shared context. (p. 4)

Realistically, some facts about the cultural others (not necessarily motivation and attitude) will have already been exposed to the world. In this regard, having good attitude, motivation, and being competent is crucial for a person to have a mindful, and appropriate interaction (Bennet, 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Thus, this paper seeks to understand how the Malaysian university students manage their interactions through a qualitative study conducted on their personal narratives of the social encounters. The following research question was formulated:

RQ: What kind of approaches do students resort to when communicating with the others from different cultures?

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were students from three public universities in the northern region of Malaysia. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the respondents based on particular criteria which include being able to communicate ideas and experiences with others, having non-Malaysian friends and having had the experience interacting with the other, in particular, the foreign students. A total of fifteen students narrated their experiences in the focus group interviews held at their own campuses. A majority of the students were in their senior years while a few were in the fourth and fifth year of study. The student profile indicates the background information including gender, year and discipline of study, and ethnicity (Table 1).

Table 1: Focus Group Interviews - Participant Information

Participant (P)	Ethnicity	Program of study	Semester	Gender
Focus Group 1				
P1	Malay	Communication	8	Male
P2	Malay	Communication	7	Male
P3	Chinese	Social Science	5	Female
P4	Chinese	Communication	7	Female
P5	Malay	Architecture	5	Female
P6	Chinese	Biology	5	Male
Focus Group 2				

P7	Malay	Communication	6	Male
P8	Chinese	Communication	10	Male
P9	Malay	Communication	10	Female
P10	Indian	Communication	4	Female
P11	Malay	Communication	4	Female
Focus Group 3				
P12	Malay	New media Communication	6	Female
P13	Malay	New media Communication	6	Female
P14	Malay	New Media Communication	6	Female
P15	Malay	New media Communication	4	Male

Source: Authors' Research Data (2018).

Procedure and Instrumentation

The students were informed of the interviews that would take place before the actual session. Informed consent forms were distributed through intermediaries who were also in charge of them. Through this approach, names of student-respondents were obtained and interview schedule was given to prepare them for the focus group sessions. The focus group interview lasted approximately one hour to one-hour-and-a-half. Care was taken to ensure the seriousness of the interviews by preparing the students as respondents for the session. They were briefed on the research intentions and procedure by the researchers (who also acted as moderators), that is, what the research intended to find out, how the interview would be done and the duration. Each focus group only had between one to two moderators. The venue chosen was typically a room where the student respondents would be comfortable sharing their interaction experiences. The responses were all recorded and transcribed for a content analysis of the spoken data. Each focus group comprised between four to six student participants who were ethnically diverse. The participants were recruited through the assistance of instructors/intermediaries who either taught the undergraduate students or knew the students through the mobility programs. The students were informed of the focus group interviews through the intermediaries. Each focus group interview took approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The participants responded fully to the open-ended questions posited by the moderators who also took note of the actual communicative exchanges. English was used as the primary language for the focus group interviews. However, some participants felt comfortable to speak in the Malay language. In such cases, the preferred language of the participants was used for easier interaction.

Data Analysis

The focus group interview data were analysed using the thematic analysis technique. The theme for every question was coded by applying the technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following the aims of the study, a conceptual thematic analysis was employed by providing description of the relationship between the themes identified. The unit of analysis for this study was sequence of sentences or a complete dialogue related to feelings, attitudes, and reactions of the participants' experiences. The NVivo 10 qualitative data software assisted in sorting out the data.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate a rather positive sentiment surrounding the student narratives. Both parties (interlocutors) were willing to accommodate and accept each other's differences despite facing numerous challenges, sometimes, awkward and unexpected ones in the process of exchanging messages in authentic situations. Such encounters indicate the participants having some form of interest (*wanting to know the other*) to engage in social interactions with those who are not necessarily from their own ethnic groups. The findings lead us to observe two emerging themes; (i) *self-adaptation*, that is, the willingness of self to accommodate and accept others, in particular, those who are different from them, which to some extent moot them to change their behavior/social acts; and (ii) *Self-consciousness of intercultural relationship*, that is, self being *alert*, and has the interest/the desire to want to know others in an attempt to learn more about others by engaging with them in the real world, for instance, through the mobility programs. The themes are, however, inter-related, which suggest that as the participants interact and adapt to the others' presence (language, cultural, religious differences), they become more conscious of their own culture, manner, and ways of speaking.

Theme 1: *Self-adaptation*, that is, the willingness of self to accommodate and accept others, in particular, those who are different from them.

As evident in the following excerpts, the student-respondents narrated their experiences as something they valued in the intercultural encounters. For instance, P1, admitted that by interacting with the international students, it would help to improve the English language proficiency. Meanwhile, P2 reflected on how the encounters started in class with a simple greeting which later expanded to more small talks. P3 admitted to changing the accent when speaking with the international students. Being willing to accept their different ways were also revealed by the others (P6, P8 and P11).

P1: *In order to improve my English I need to interact with them.*

P2: *Last time we only met in class and we just like just say hi... then after a long time we get to talk like [we] asked "how are you?", "what are you doing?", "how's the class?" then we... we get more... more things to talk about... compared to last time...For me, there [are] no differences interacting with Malays or foreigners...because when in class, we just talk about class, about subjects... just talk on the basis of what we [know when we meet]...*

P3: *We have to change our slang somehow [with Chinese from China].*

P6: *If you [are] with [your] own race, you will end up being in your own zone. We live in a multiracial country and we need a multiracial mind as well. So if you [are] only with your own race you will end up having one track minded which is not good I think.*

I have [a] committee, I can say, almost every day I have the interaction with them, cause like we [have] actually the same ideas ... So most of the time I [am] always here at the office interacting with the students, they will come here if they have problem or they need to ask something. How do I interact with them... it depends if they come to look for us or they seek for help they will start the conversation, like of course usually they come and we will approach them "how can I help you?" and then that's how we will start the conversation. And then the students will start to tell us the problems and it goes like that.

P8: *Okay... For me, I don't have any problem dealing with foreign students or foreign lecturers. When I was in previous school, I used to mix with the foreign students... So when in [this university] I love to make new friends. I say hi to everybody and some of them get tired of me so they ignored me (laughing). So, I don't care and I keep doing it, searching new friends.*

P11: *I started to interact with Nigerians... and I observed when they are walking together, they like to hold hands. There was one time my Nigerian friend tried to hold my hand. I felt awkward and laughed.*

Some people [are] good in English but some are not.... but we must tolerate....we know our differences... sometimes they can't follow our culture, so we must tolerate each other.

The following narratives reveal how the participants reflect on their attempts to get connected with the others as they fine-tuned their speech:

P6: *I think ... when you [are] involved with [the] international students, our first language will be English. That is our first language. So regardless where you [come] from, the first language will be English and it depends how it flows. Sometimes we know like, for example, we communicate with those from Japan, okay Japanese ...err... they lack [the command of] English ...so we have to go slow so we might be understood, we have the experience with Japanese, their English is not as good as the girls from Europe, probably. So we have to go a little bit down, lower down our level of English. I like to speak [slowly] when I communicate with them. So it depends, it really depends on who we talk to.*

P2: *Basically, when I meet Japanese people I try to speak with them with my limited knowledge of the language but still they cannot understand. So that is [challenging], how to understand [people].*

P3: *For me, maybe English will be the first language I use but [sometimes I] mix it, especially like Japanese and Korean [languages], the vocabs maybe one or two words, we just [use] some Japanese words [in between] like Thai, I understand it a little bit.*

P4: *I think it is generally the same for me also because I think English is a very...how to say, worldwide language. So when we meet foreign persons we usually start with "hi. How are you?" in English and that person, most of them understand simple English. But when I interact with like maybe Japanese students, for example, I will try to use some of their words. So that sometimes when you use their language they will feel familiar with you and then they will be more interested to speak with you even though we can't speak Japanese and they can't speak fluent English but there is connection maybe and then they will be friendlier towards you.*

Researcher: you make them, the others feel good?

P6: *Yes. When we speak their language, they will [be] close to us. That's how we connect with each other.*

Theme 2: *Self-consciousness of intercultural relationship*; that is, self being alert, and has the interest/the desire to want to know others in an attempt to learn more about others by engaging with them in the real world, for instance, through the mobility programs.

The following excerpts draw attention to the interest shared among the participants that help them build intercultural relationships:

P1: *I like to see their facial expression, like when we [say] "Ohayou" "Konichiwa" and then "Oh you know my language" (yaaa...) they [are] also excited.*

For P1, for instance, seeing the other person's facial expression is important in interactions and having the knowledge of interacting with the other.

P1: As long as we know how to communicate and build relationship...we can start from there. I try to talk to him (an international student) ...then we hang out together and travel together...from that we try to build relationship, be nice to each other and be confident to build relationship. It is difficult at first ...because our English is not really good... but during orientation, I sat beside him... I just smiled [at] him ... then I tried to talk to him... I said... sorry if you cannot understand me because my English is not good. Then he said, it is ok as long as you talk and we can understand. It started from there, we are close especially in class and we also travel together...

P3: So first I [do] not interact with them.... then after I [was given the] assignment so I tried to interact with them... about how to do the assignment actually... So at first, I'm quite shy to talk with them because I'm [not] good in English.

For P3 also, being open minded and having encountered the other helps in the communication. Knowing more about the other individuals should be accompanied with a clear conscience.

*I have the experience of being friends with foreigners through sport tournament activities. These were international competitions, so many people from Indonesia, Vietnam, and Philippines [were] also involved in the activities.
I have a Chinese friend, he is Christian. Last time I accompanied him to the church to pray. I just sat down in the back and saw how they performed the prayer. Quite interesting... I don't mind what other people think because I don't think it's wrong because I just want to know, why I must be worried.
I am open minded and understand him...for me it's ok to be a culturally different even though we have the same religion, I think maybe we come from different sect. This sect says this... and others say that...*

In the following excerpts, the student narratives point toward having positive mindsets to suit the others and be motivated to know the others.

*P4: When I first joined, I think, like...I understand their... how to say...
Researcher: Mind set?*

*P4: Yes... mind set... so I tend to adjust myself to their mind set. Like, to learn about Japanese, you must know that they are very on time for example in Malaysia I have interacted with some Japanese who came here and then when I went to Japan, I know them... I understand their mind set so I learn how to be more Japanese. (laughing) To be more punctual, discipline...
They take the initiatives to learn our language...*

P9: Okay the things that I [do] to [become closer] to my foreign friends, the first one is [when] we got many subjects...then we study together in the library especially for final exam. So from previous semester until current semester, we are still close... because [of] the subject ... then, we try to teach [other students]... we have many group assignments with them... so that make[s] me close to my friends.

P10: I think it takes like a lot of patience to interact with them [Chinese Chinese] and also through experience you slowly learn how to [catch up] with them.

P11: *For me, as long as their cultures that he applied here did not contradict with what I learn, I just accept... as people said, to know someone, we must accept them...*

The student narratives consist of positive attitude toward the others including having the desire to know them, learn other people's language and culture:

P1: *Ya when I take some minor in language, I have a minor language, I will ask for their help, [I say] please talk in your language because I need to improve myself even though we can speak in English.*

P4: *Openness is important... if I have given choice to travel other counties, I will take it as challenges. Because I feel like it's interesting when we learn the culture of others...*

P6: *We actually like to exchange culture, exchange language at the same time... We still use English. For example, since I know a little bit of Thai, I know the language little bit, sometimes, when students from Thailand come, I try to converse with them to improve my language, my third language. We just like, that is the only way for you to (improve) master the language...improve your language, through the language, so you need to speak. So whenever I have the students from Thai, I will try to speak Thai. That is how we improvise our third language.*

P12: *For me if we want to communicate, we have to know and learn other language[s]...it is important for me...*

Discussion

The students tend to adapt their ways of interacting with the others in the campus setting. They seem to behave differently when they communicate with others, in an attempt to know more about them even if this might mean, 'improvising' their manner of articulating the speech or even accent. They also pay attention to non-verbal communication and others' reactions. They seem conscious of their social enactment, in particular, of their language competence, or rather, the intercultural competence when they have to converse with the international students. They emphasise the need to maintain a good mindset of the other persons in intercultural encounters. Such awareness raises a few pertinent points which include, being prepared to reorient oneself to the culture, be alert of the other's religious beliefs, and the language of the other in maintaining a harmonious communication whilst keeping their religious beliefs intact, and learning about one's culture with the intention to use this knowledge to interact with the other person better. This goes along with Nelson Mandela's attitude towards the prison guard who attended to him during his imprisonment which foster a good relationship between them. As Mandela (Peace Corps Book, 1996) shared, "If you talk to a man in the language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart" (p. vi). Clearly, there must be a purpose for communication as attested by the participants. The latter obviously reoriented their ways of thinking and conversing with others. To echo Deardorff (2009), the question that we might pose here is, to what extent should individuals adapt to intercultural encounters?

The study indicates that participants see themselves as adaptive to cultural others. Perhaps, such adaptability comes from the cultural diversity that is already present in Malaysia which needs to be fully embraced and acknowledged. This further suggests that people reflect and make sense of the interactions through their personal encounters, and as a result, they adapt their ways of conduct to suit the others. Their sensemaking approach assists in reducing sensitivities in interethnic communication in daily experiences (Harun, 2007). The existence of social harmony amongst the different ethnic groups in Malaysia, and the efforts made by the authority to achieve national integration (Shamsul, 2005, 2008) might have created more opportunities for participants to develop adaptive behaviours toward others in real life encounters.

Conclusion

This paper has shared the Malaysian university students' narratives of their intercultural encounters with diverse others in the campus. Through own enacted and individual strategies, the students managed their social interactions in the campus for varied reasons. The idea of *groupism* seems to be rather loose with the social networks as the result of globalization and digitalization. People are no longer exclusive; rather, the very notion of inclusiveness remains to be deeply explored as more interactions occur across the globe through the social networks. The impact of how people communicate, or write in the virtual realm can be tremendous, be it positively or negatively. Many people (students), as observed in the study, attempted in some ways or other, yet positively as indicated in the narratives to adapt their communication styles to suit the style of their communication partners. The idea is to have a fairly smooth and intelligible (effective) conversation. In doing so, the interactants manage to learn about the other cultures and ways of speaking.

More studies need to be done in revealing ways of coping with interethnic communication encounters among students at the tertiary institutions where the world today witnesses an

increasing number of international students mingling with the local students. As young people, students need to know how to negotiate effectively, politely, and appropriately with people from other cultures. Issues of concern revolve around the approaches that should be taken; for instance, how do we ensure that students have sufficient competency to interact with others? How will students be taught to interact, for instance, in the virtual realm given that the act of writing (or rather, texting) the wordings is personal and done interpersonally among the virtual interlocutors whose facial expressions (non-verbal communication) are not visible to those engaged in the social networks?

Perhaps, students need be exposed to ice-breaking activities and greetings more fully as these are important features of conversation which will help them to start communicating with anybody. The same applies to the other, whoever the person might be. The implication here suggests that building confidence is important. As such, the habit of initiating intercultural or interpersonal communication should be taught. Such skills are trainable but the crucial thing is to train students to initiate interpersonal communication; in that way, intercultural communication competence can be realised, and intercultural encounters can occur meaningfully and effectively. This also calls for polite strategies to be taught through courtesy language or language that is hospitable, particularly on the part of the host country. English language should be viewed as useful to be learned by Malaysians (or other non-native speakers of English) given the polite expressions or magic words available, such as 'please' and 'thank you', and the modal verbs, 'Can I', 'Could I' to begin with. The language knowledge can be added with geographic literacy of the other.

When the person has geographic literacy, it helps the individual to know where the other interlocutor comes from. This can be a workable strategy in communication, which is to make the person feels appreciated. The more knowledge about geography or about other people the interlocutors have, the better it is for them. Thus, when we talk about the person's hometown, we develop something in common, which is showing interest towards the other (goodwill). This eventually leads the individuals to become exposed to not only each other's cultures, but also, learn to be familiar with ways of speaking with the others. In doing so, they both engage in deliberate learning of the other's culture. Clearly, there ought to be a goal setting agenda which promotes the idea that learning other cultures is essential in an interconnected world.

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